

Approved 1/11/2021

Town of Chelmsford Select Board Minutes  
Chelmsford, MA 01824

In-Person Meeting located at School Admin Building, 230 North Rd., Chelmsford  
Virtual meeting via Zoom for Public Chat function only

Work Session Meeting MINUTES  
September 22, 2020

Attending:

Kenneth Lefebvre, Chair  
Virginia Crocker Timmins, Vice Chair  
George Dixon, Clerk  
Emily Antul, Board Member  
Patricia Wojtas, Board Member

Paul Cohen, Town Manager

Please note that all documents referenced in these minutes are on file at the Town Manager's Office, 50 Billerica Rd., Chelmsford, Mass. The meeting was recorded by Chelmsford Telemedia. Chairman Lefebvre called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM, and read the following announcement:

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place, there will be no in-person attendance of members of the public at this meeting. Every effort will be made to ensure that the public can adequately access the proceedings in real time, via technological means. In the event that we are unable to do so, despite best efforts, we will post on the Town's website an audio or video recording, transcript, or other comprehensive record of proceedings as soon as possible after the meeting.

**Goals:**

**Select Board**

**Town Manager**

Board Member Wojtas stated that sewer options are a priority, including respective timelines.

Board Member Timmins agreed, and she suggested that tasks be divided into long term and short term objectives. She also suggested considering changes to the approval process when large projects come forward, to include more communication between the appropriate Town Departments and the Planning Board.

Mr. Cohen noted the Town may need to consider a growth moratorium on zoning. The Planning Board does not get information on sewer and water capacity when these projects are presented. Under current zoning bylaws, they cannot deny or postpone an application because of sewer and water constraints. Input from Town departments is discussed informally before the hearings. Recently, developers are having more discussions with abutters and some departments prior to the formal hearing.

Board Member Timmins asked whether there should be more tracking done in regard to sewer and water capacity. Mr. Cohen indicated that the new Master Plan may include recommendations for additional tracking of development and capacity. This document is owned by the Planning Board. There could be a

Master Plan Implementation Committee set up again. Other issues to be tracked could include schools, utilities, water and sewer, and other services.

The Sewer Commission was dissolved when the sewer system was completed. In 1997 and 2004, it was known that at some point full capacity would be reached, and a reserve fund was set up at that time. More large scale development has quickened the rate at which capacity was reached. There have been sewer treatment agreements with the City of Lowell since 1977.

Board Member Antul asked whether developers should be responsible for building their own treatment plants as a way to address some of the capacity issue.

Mr. Cohen indicated that when the 2010 Master Plan was written, there was not a lot of development at that time, as the country was coming out of an economic recession. There was no discussion about capacity, as there was not a lot of development foreseen.

Board Member Timmins suggested that a goal could be to look at how the Town can move forward, such as by having discussions and analysis with the Planning Board.

Chairman Lefebvre recalled attending many economic development meetings and updates. Lisa Marrone was hired to promote commercial development. Now it appears that Chelmsford is not ready to handle more development.

Mr. Cohen agreed that zoning bylaws may need to be revised, and perhaps more inter-department meetings could be had to discuss planning process.

The firm of Weston and Sampson has been hired to do an engineering study of addressing the sewer capacity issue. This will include analysis and the feasibility of looking at Southwell as a potential new treatment plant location. Many things will need to be looked at before this can be considered. Chelmsford pays \$1.7 million yearly to the City of Lowell in sewer treatment fees now.

Chairman Lefebvre suggested that addressing current sewer capacity issues and addressing our internal processes could be two separate but related goals. Traffic issues could also be a joint goal. North Chelmsford traffic could be a separate goal or project to address. The complaint is that Chelmsford is being used as a cut-through, however, these are public roads. Mr. Cohen noted that all neighborhoods have traffic issues, so the goal should be to study traffic in general.

Past goals from the last 2 years that were completed and are still being worked on were listed.

The COVID-19 pandemic is shifting priorities.

The Fire Station study is ongoing and will need more discussion. The North sub-station will remain in any scenario. Then, there will be a discussion of how many other stations will remain. All the existing stations need work and upgrades.

The goal relating to development on Rt. 129 and overall economic development will remain, and work will continue. Mr. Cohen summarized past efforts to support businesses during the pandemic, such as grants, outdoor seating, and allowing alcoholic drinks “to go”. New regulations for the winter season are being published by the State.

Communication enhancements such as the new Town website and other day to day communications were listed. Some of these initiatives may be delayed in light of more pressing issues.

Chairman Lefebvre asked to review the five-10 year plans to address aging buildings and other facility needs.

He suggested that more financial forecasting may be needed in the budget discussions to work within the levy limits.

Board Member Antul advised that the Town needs to look at more green energy options, as natural gas costs are exploding. The Town needs to attract new industries such as biotech, and solar companies.

Board Member Timmins asked what strategies could be used in developing future budgets.

Chairman Lefebvre asked what were the best and worst case scenarios for the next 12-18 months, and what type of projects should the Town encourage and discourage for the next 5 years. Mr. Cohen reminded the Board that many of these concerns regarding development are Planning Board issues, not Select Board issues. Local government cannot determine what the future holds.

Mr. Cohen advised that certain revenues such as the meals and hotels taxes are a very small part of the budget. The state has not even formed a budget. The Town is dependent on the margins. Board Member Antul felt the Board tries to determine a course of action, and the Town shouldn't be waiting for the state legislature to bestow funds on it. There is a lack of vision in failing to set goals. When things are bad, things are leveraged. The Board needs to look at possibilities, and it needs to be able to ask questions.

Chairman Lefebvre agreed the Board should be proactive, rather than reactionary. Mr. Cohen advised that the Town can't lower the tax levy and invest in infrastructure and facility improvements. Facility improvements are always being looked at, and there are 5 and 10 year plans in place. If there is another shutdown, there will be more impacts. There is also a need to maintain employee morale. The biggest department in Town is the School Department, and this Board has no control over their budget and hiring decisions. There is not much discretionary spending in the Town's operating budget. There are many fixed costs in the budget. A suggested goal could be to implement a benchmark survey on staff and costs and line this data up with other similar towns, to include road miles and schools. No one is ever happy with their tax bills. Mr. Cohen feels the town is well run with the available resources. He supported getting the data and letting residents see it.

Mr. Lefebvre felt that Mr. Cohen should share more of the knowledge he has when doing these projected budgets and facility decisions. Mr. Cohen stated that the annual Capital Plan demonstrates capital preparedness. The five year projections are published every year in budget presentations.

The Board agreed that using the stabilization fund is helping the Town remain financially stable. The School Department has budget autonomy over their share of the town funds allotted to them. Chairman Lefebvre and Board Member Antul agreed to provide Mr. Cohen with a written document that outlines what they feel the possible courses of action the Town could take, and how to put more money in infrastructure, to include where to invest, and where to leverage resources to get ahead of the issues that are coming while waiting for the pandemic to end. Mr. Cohen advised, the budget also needs to address unfunded liabilities. These philosophies can be discussed in future meetings.

Board Member Wojtas suggested a new goal of developing a plan for the use of the recently purchased Warren-Pohl farm, to include the wording of the conservation restriction.

Board Member Wojtas requested that the List of Boards and Committees on the Town's website be updated, as it is not accurate, and the old link should be disconnected. Mr. Cohen reported that they are looking for a software vendor that can provide a useable form.

Board Member Wojtas suggested developing a plan that makes public events more socially distant, and to regenerate interest in these events that are good for resident morale, such as the Holiday Prelude and Winterfest. Mr. Cohen reported that no state guidance has been given for Halloween yet. All communities are waiting to hear and coordinate. The Town of Salem has cancelled most of its events. There may need to be a regional plan.

Board Member Timmins suggested that the Board should monitor work of the Diversity Committee to see what actions need to be taken. Board Member Antul noted that some of the Diversity Committee members are not comfortable with their contact information being public.

Board Member Timmins suggested a goal of implementing the recommendations of the Vision and Values Committee.

A report from the Age Friendly Initiative Committee is awaited, which may create additional goals.

Board Member Wojtas stated the Board's Policies and Procedures documents should be updated to reflect the Board's name change, as well as recently approved policies. She also indicated that several new policies should be considered, which she will bring forward.

A protocol is needed regarding Town Counsel communication policies. Residents feel they have the authority to speak with Town Counsel on behalf of the Town. All communication should come from the Town Manager or the Board.

Chairman Lefebvre asked that Board Members send drafts to him to reflect the goals that each member brought up, so that the information can be consolidated.

### **Codes of Conduct and Policies**

#### **Select Board Code of Conduct**

#### **Town Manager Code of Conduct**

The Board has a current policy document that they follow.

Board Member Wojtas provided a draft document that she crafted from codes of conduct used in other towns. Board Member Timmins noted that some of the concepts are already in the Town charter and the Board's policy document, and may be redundant. Board Member Wojtas felt the Code of Conduct should be geared more toward behaviors. Responsibilities are addressed in the other documents.

Board members will look at different variations of the codes for future discussion.

### **Internet Code of Conduct**

#### **Social Media Policy**

Proposed documents were submitted by the Human Resources Department. All employees are asked to sign off on these policies. Boards and committees may also be asked to sign off on them.

Board Member Timmins noted some grammar changes on page 5 & 6 which look like cut and paste issues. These will be corrected.

Approved 1/11/2021

**Adjournment**

**Motion:** by Board Member Timmins to adjourn the meeting at 8:04PM. Seconded by Board Member Dixon. **Motion carries, unanimous, 5-0.**

**Next Regular Meeting: September 28, 2020**

Respectfully Submitted,

Vivian W. Merrill  
Recording Secretary

Supporting Documents:

- Select Board Code of Conduct
- Town Manager Code of Conduct
- Internet Code of Conduct
- Social Media Policy